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FILE ON

Too Many Clouds

President Reagan has enough top aides moving out of their jobs under a cloud. The last thing that he needs is one moving *into* a job under a cloud. He would be wise to withdraw the name of Robert M. Gates and find someone else to direct the Central Intelligence Agency.

The cloud over Gates, now deputy director of the CIA, has been gathering since confirmation hearings before the Senate Intelligence Committee began earlier this month. Chairman David Boren (D-Okla.) was supportive, largely on the ground that Gates seemed more willing to cooperate with Congress than did his cantankerous predecessor, William J. Casey. Other members were not so sure. ~~And Gates~~ In his appearance before the committee, seemed bright and pleasant enough, eager to please, but his manner did not suggest the presence of command that would equip him to ride the CIA tiger, let alone tame it.

The cloud began to rain on Gates' parade Thursday with the release of the Tower Commission's report on the Iran-*contra* scandal. One question during confirmation hearings was whether he would be his own man or whether he was so intent on the next rung of his career ladder that he would do anything that someone of higher rank might ask him to do.

The Tower Commission on Wednesday seemed to confirm earlier published reports that Gates circulated a memorandum about the potential for Soviet mischief in Iran that was at odds with the

consensus of others at the agency but was just what the National Security Council wanted to hear.

The memorandum, written in May, 1985, said that the Soviet Union was in a good position to take advantage of the chaos in Iran that the National Security Council feared would follow the death of the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, and that the United States was not. Using that assessment, two aides to Robert C. McFarlane, former national-security adviser, proposed that the United States "encourage Western allies and friends to help Iran meet its important requirements," including arms, as a means of establishing an American presence to match that of the Soviets.

The rest is history—including the resignation of the man whom Gates succeeded as deputy, John A. McMahon, who resigned when he lost a fight to have the CIA wash its hands of arms shipments to Iran.

The Senate committee, which plans to examine Gates' role in excruciating detail during closed hearings next week, is already divided over whether to vote now or wait for more evidence to accumulate. That could take months, and Chairman Boren would rather the committee decide soon whether to confirm or reject Gates or ask the President to withdraw the nomination.

The President should not wait. He should withdraw the nomination and find a nominee who walks around under clearer skies.